

Christian Scientists have a long history in Duxbury

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The following is the eighth in a series examining the history and role of churches and houses of worship in Duxbury.

Christian Scientist founder Mary Baker Eddy was born and raised in New Hampshire, but spent much of her adult life in Massachusetts and, in 1879, founded the faith she called Christian Science. With the building of a mother church in Boston's Back Bay in 1894 and the Christian Science Monitor daily newspaper in 1908, Eddy's church spread around the state and across the world before her death in Newton in 1910.

But it wasn't until 1952, 42 years after Eddy's death, that the Christian Scientists found a home here in Duxbury in the Island Creek Hall Association, which shared the Parks Street building for 12 years and gave it to the church in 1964. The First Church of Christ, Scientist, Duxbury, congregation has been there ever since. What is Christian Science?

In essence, it is the belief that prayer and meditation can help a person conquer any problem or illness. "Although in the day of Mary Baker Eddy, people didn't use terms like 'the power of positive thinking,' that's the essence of the thought behind our faith," said longtime Christian Scientist and Duxbury resident Peter Winterbottom. "In other words, the way you perceive a situation influences your experience in the situation." Throughout her life, Eddy had been chronically ill and had struggled to get better using the medicine available at the time and homeopathic methods from the era. Nothing worked.

"I think anyone would be considered brave for trying those methods today," said Winterbottom. "It involved a lot of bleeding and leeches... procedures we would never think of today." Christian Scientists try to avoid medical treatments, but Winterbottom noted that founder Eddy had been very clear that her followers were to follow the law wherever they were. "In some places, there are exemptions (in areas of mandatory physicals for schools or camps and vaccinations), in others there are not. We follow the law where we are. Christian Scientists are allowed to take medicine," he explained.

The church has no clergy. Members read from the King James Bible and Eddy's own contemplative book, "Science and Health" (first published in 1875) for their services, one on Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. and another on Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m., both at the Parks Street location. Services are performed by two readers, who have been elected by the community for one to three-year terms.

"The second half is open to whomever would like to speak about their own spiritual journey or healing," said Winterbottom. "The first half of our service is more about listening, reading and contemplating." He noted that children are allowed to sit in on the service if they want to, but Sunday School is available on the second floor to everyone under the age of 20. "Inside the service, you are really listening and reading and contemplating," said Winterbottom. "So the kids often enjoy Sunday School."

To find out more about First Church of Christ, Scientist, Duxbury, visit the church's reading room on Standish Street in Hall's Corner or its website: Duxburysrr.com.



Members of Duxbury's Christian Scientist church have met in this Parks Street building since 1964.

Photo by Mary McKenzie